A model of effective employee engagement and management to align employee expectations with organizational challenges post Covid 19 pandemic

Synopsis

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1. INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 pandemic is global, extremely severe and totally unexpected disaster which has impacted each and everyone in this world drastically. It is impacting humans financially, socially, physically and mentally. Corporates are made of human workforce. Without energetic, skilled and motivated human workforce, no organization can succeed and survive. Due to restrictions to work physically in corporate premises, there is a surge of running business operations from home wherever it is possible. This has encouraged culture of work from home and working virtually with digital technologies in India and across the world. But it has its own advantages and disadvantages. On top of it, there is a need to adopt digital new age skills and companies need to acquire digital technology to manage this change. So organisations need understanding to cope up this change and heavy budgets to spend money on employee wellbeing, skill development and digital technologies. This is becoming essential now for rebuilding organizational culture and operational resilience to survive and complete in cut throat market.

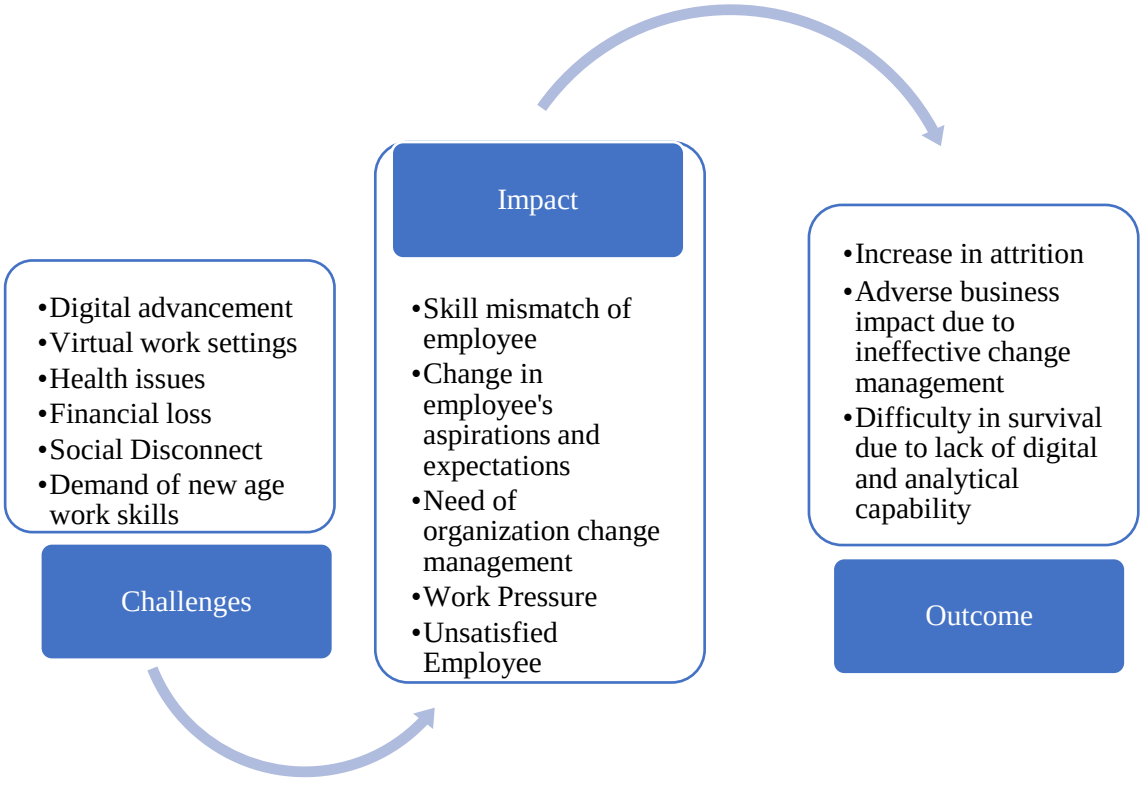

Figure 1: Impact of Covid 19 Pandemic on Organization and its Workforce

Covid-19 has changed the way organization work. It has also pushed companies to do business differently which is modern, adaptive and customer friendly. Customer's expectations have also changed due to Covid 19. Emergence of contactless and door to door service has increased drastically.

Cloud computing and online payments are common now. The nine new job trends post Covid-19 explained by Gartner in its official website are:

1. Increase in remote working in form of work from home or work from anywhere
2. Expanded data collection to analyse employee's work patterns
3. Increase in contingent or contractual work force
4. Expanded employer role in employee's social, financial and mental well being
5. Segregation of critical roles and skills to meet strategic goals
6. De-humanization of employees
7. Emergence of new top tier employers
8. Transition from efficiency-based designs to resilience-based designs
9. Increase in organizational complexity due to accelerated M&A Activity and evolving operating models.

So, there is a need of new workforce strategy for a post covid 19 recovery. Deloitte has defined key strategies in its workbook of post covid-19 recovery. These are in three modules; work, workforce and workplace.

- Work module says "Are we returning to the way we worked before, or adopting new ways of working?"
- Workforce module asks "How does capacity, capability, and affordability affect workforce design after the crisis?"
- And Workplace module explores "What did we learn about working in the flow of life? How did it impact work when the boundaries between work and life are blurred?"

It provides the alternatives and solutions in three degrees; respond recover and thrive.

- Respond module talks about "Dealing with the present situation and managing continuity"
- Recover guides for learning and emerging stronger for building resilience and
- Thrive prepares for new normal

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Published reports, research journals and corporate white papers are studied to understand and analyse

the pain areas and new expectations of employees, new job trends, challenges faced by corporates and the solutions available for workforce management in post Covid era.

2.1 Job Satisfaction

The degree to which an employee feels self-motivated, content, and satisfied with his or her employment is defined as job satisfaction. When an employee thinks he or she has employment security, professional progress, and a comfortable work-life balance, this is referred to as job satisfaction. This indicates that the person is happy at work since the work matches his or her expectations. Job satisfaction entails performing work that one enjoys, doing it well, and getting compensated for it. Job satisfaction also refers to a person's enthusiasm for and enjoyment of their profession (Shajahan, 2021).

Job satisfaction is a vital factor in achieving recognition, salary, promotion, and other objectives that lead to a sense of fulfilment (Kaliski, 2007).

Job satisfaction can also be defined as a worker's contentment with the benefits he or she receives from their job, especially in terms of intrinsic motivation (Statt, 2004).

There are multiple factors responsible for job satisfaction. These are

1. Protection from virus mutations
2. Personal safety
3. Communication with doctors
4. Work place safety
5. Amount of work pressure
6. Leisure time
7. Working conditions
8. Nature of work
9. Role of immediate boss
10. Work load and working hours
11. Self-expression possibility
12. Family protection
13. Financial security to self and family (Shajahan, 2021)

2.2 Employees' Mental Health

Job happiness has a strong link to mental health. Job satisfaction is the degree to which employees are satisfied with their jobs. It's also the favourable emotional condition that comes from work expertise. Working remotely for a short period of time can improve job satisfaction by increasing organisational commitment and the quality of relationships with leaders while reducing work-time friction. As a result, the COVID-19-related spontaneous and temporary change to WFH could have a favourable impact on employee's mental health. Previous research on the impact of WFH on mental health, however, has yielded mixed results, such as lower social connectivity, loneliness, depression etc (Niebuhr et al., 2022).

2.3 Quality of Work Life

Job satisfaction is reflected in QWL, or quality of work life. Employees that are more satisfied can provide higher-quality work. This may help to reduce job turnover while also improving staff morale. However, due to a variety of causes such as fear of losing a job and reduced employee involvement, this COVID19-Pandemic phase has a negative impact on employee morale and satisfaction. The study found that effective HRM practises, including QWL, had a beneficial impact on workers' work attitudes, and the findings highlighted that a few activities are particularly important in moulding employees' attitudes toward work and the organisation (Balanagalakshmi, et al., 2020).

2.4 Work Life Balance

Maintaining Work-life balance is a significant aspect in an employee's job satisfaction. Every employee aspires to strike a balance between his professional and personal lives. This is only achievable if he prepares and adheres to a proper schedule. This may assist him organise his time schedule so that he may complete his different work commitments while also reducing his stress levels. This can be accomplished by flexible work hours, working from home when necessary, telecommuting, working in shifts, and other methods. Maintaining a balance of tasks and responsibilities at work and at home is referred to as work-life balance. Work-life balance is one of the most pressing concerns that women face in the current jobs (Kaur, 2018).

2.5 Work Place Stress

There will be no employee turnover in an environment where there is no workplace stress. Stress, the silent killer, has an impact on employees' physical and mental health, as well as their work pace and

morale toward their employer, resulting in a high rate of employee turnover and greater training and development costs. Employees' livelihoods have been severely harmed by the pandemic, particularly those who work in private entities such as organisations or institutions. Excessive workload, no provision for further development in the form of trainings, arbitrary timings, downsizing irrespective of the undertaking, reduced salary, lack of motivation, and no vacations are just a few of the factors that have a negative impact on employees' well-being both at work and at home. Employees are also induced to leave the organisation due to poor management of workplace stress due to a lack of training programmes available (Sahyaja, 2018).

2.6 COVID-19 and Strategic HRM

Strategic agility is essential to ensure the achievement of corporate goals in a moment of crisis (Liu and Lee, 2020). Organizations must be able to plan and allocate their resources, as well as coordinate the necessary mechanisms and make good use of their resources and knowledge (Liu and Lee, 2020). In this context, the COVID-19's uniqueness and complexity provide a substantial obstacle that could jeopardise the attainment of corporate objectives. Standard economic models in organisations are mostly trained to use data from a 'normal times' perspective (Baert et al., 2020). As a result, making forecasts about 'abnormal times' is difficult. This could imply that creating predictions about the company's business, such as resource allocation and planning, is a difficult task (Hamouche, 2021). COVID-19 has, in reality, created doubt. Some academics expect the COVID-19 is endemic now (Regmi & Lwin, 2020), whereas several economists estimate the pandemic's effects will last until 2021 (Akkermans et al., 2020). Even after the recent development of different types of vaccines (Yu et al., 2021), no one knows when this virus will end or if its effects on work patterns in organisations will be temporary or permanent (Bartik et al., 2020). As a result, managers and HRM practitioners may find it difficult to carry out strategic planning or to put the first one into action. In this case, most organisations were unable to provide sufficient information to their employees about their management plan or intended responses to the pandemic (Elsafty & Ragheb, 2020), whereas having clear workplace guidelines during difficult times helps to reduce employee stress and increase motivation and confidence (Elsafty & Ragheb, 2020). Elsafty & Ragheb's study (Elsafty & Ragheb, 2020) found that employees' retention is highly influenced by access to information and updates about the epidemic. However, due to the novelty of this pandemic,

it may be difficult to achieve if organisations are unable to obtain this information, particularly while they are in a reactive and survival mode. Enhancing organisational resilience is necessary to preserve the organization's long-term viability in the COVID-19 age (Ngoc Su et al., 2021). In reality, despite the uncertainty created by the epidemic, businesses must devise inventive strategies to absorb and deal with the disruption that threatens their survival (Ngoc Su et al., 2021).

3. RESEARCH GAP

Remote working during Covid-19 has brought both positive and negative impacts to organization and employees. Although it has facilitated the running of business operations during pandemic, employee engagement, team bonding, physical face to face interactions and work scheduling and monitoring suffered a lot leading to reduction in team synergies, social disconnect and health concerns to employees. To improve employee-connect, many organisations are planning to move from virtual work arrangements to physical office settings i.e. RTO or return to Office.

But now there is shift in employee's expectations and they want work from home or flexi work hours to have work life balance or to pursue their passions or life goals. Employees are leaving current employers to look for more suitable options which can meet their new expectations.

So Financial planners, HR analysts and CXO leaders are looking hard for developing a strategic model which can make an optimal use of human resource, digital and other overheads and give job satisfaction to employees so that they feel motivated, be productive and do not attrite from the company.

They want to identify the employees' pain areas and their expectations in this new normal to create a resilient business operation model and fully motivated team which is completely equipped for market while giving least burden to its financials.

Exiting research work identify the impact of remote working on employees related to health, work life balance and productivity of work but it fails to explore the new human resource engagement and workforce management model basis newly developed expectations of employees.

4. NEED OF STUDY

Covid-19 pandemic has brought many challenges for corporates to face with. Organizations are struggling to understand how to meet employee's expectation and re-establish organizational culture of values, team work and collaboration in this digitization age and flexi work culture. The employee

expectations are changed. Work from home, virtual team collaborations. working in Silos, flexible shift timings, common work hubs, digitization of process transformation, increase in contractual resources, increased productivity targets, employee attrition, employee demotivation, social disconnects, skill mismatch, lack of digital and new age analytical skill, mental issues, depression, virtual training, issues in coaching and onboarding, work from anywhere, use of bots, HR analytics on employee's work pattern etc adding lot of pressure on employees and leadership. It is a big change which corporates and employees are trying to adopt. Naturally due to all these factors, organisations are in extreme pressure to manage this change and to become resilient and acceptable.

Workforce management practices should be analysed and modified to meet this new change and to build a strong and loyal work force. For doing this, they need to understand the pain areas and expectations of employee and align them to organizational challenges and create a solution which can meet both the ends

5. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are

1. To understand employees' expectations from its employer post covid-19 pandemic
2. To examine the challenges faced by corporates in workforce management and engagement post covid-19 pandemic
3. To develop a strategic model for employee engagement and human resource management which can survive and excel post covid-19 pandemic

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research work will be descriptive research study based on survey techniques.

6.1 Data Collection and Sampling

1. Data will be collected through primary research
2. Interview For primary research, questionnaire will be circulated to 384 (Krejcie & Morgan 1970) employees under scope to get their opinions and inputs on their expectations from current job opportunities.
3. Also, interviews will be conducted to 25 HR and change management SME to understand management point of view on the challenges faced by organisations to deal employee expectations

during covid 19 pandemic.

4. The sectors in the scope of study are BPO, KPO and Captives or GIC in India. As per Nasscom Insights "The Evolution of Global In House Centers" dated 28 August 2020; Global in-house centres (GICs) represent the future of global business in many aspects, with revenue expected to exceed $350 billion by 2025 in India alone. Multinational corporations (MNCs) have grown to rely substantially on GICs, notably in India, during the last two decades, and not just for outsourced business services with a cost-cutting mindset. GICs offer the possibility for partnerships based on similar organisational goals and a level of innovation that benefits the parent organisation distinctively, having demonstrated that the model can produce sustainable growth and value over time. Several companies have developed competencies and progressed up the value chain to establish Global Centres of Excellence in a variety of fields. With the digital disruption occurring throughout these centres to bring higher productivity and lower operating costs through consolidation, analytics, and technology, these centres are transitioning from operations to innovation centres.
5. The companies in these sectors are concentrated in few of the major cities of India. These are Gurgaon, Noida, Bangalore, Pune, Chennai, Hyderabad and Mumbai.
6. The Sample will be cluster sampling and random sampling in two stages.
7. The age group will be of 40 years and below as the job segment changes after this much of experience to mid senior and leadership levels.
8. Marital status will also be classified to see employee's expectations as per marital status.
9. Employee's residential proximity to work location and mode of transport will also be considered in sampling.

6.2 Data analysis

Responses will be assimilated to establish relation of employee's job satisfaction with different variables identified basis past studies. Data analysis will be done basis mixed data analysis approach. Responses from employees will be analysed using quantitative data analysis and responses from HR and management will be analysed using qualitative data analysis techniques.

Checks and corrections will be applied so as to make the data clean, remove bias and outliers.

Analysis will be done basis multivariate factor analysis to prioritize employees' expectations during Covid19. A model will be created for effective employee engagement and management that can meet organizational challenges and employee expectations in this new normal.

6.3 Limitation of Research

As the corporate world is very big to be included in this scope of research, only employees of India location working in BPO/KPO/GIC are considered for this study. This is because this sector is latest emerging sector and India is a number one destination for this sector. There is a surge in digital transformation in the processes of this sector to provide productivity and cost savings to parent companies by converting these centres from operations centres to centre of excellence for innovation, analytics and technology. (Rao et al 2020) Due to all these, these is a huge demand of professional workforce who have same expertise around these roles. Due to flexible timings and non-location-based roles during Covid-19, employees are attracted to pursue these roles which has caused attrition rates to new heights and a new term coined as "Great resignation".

7. CHAPTERIZATION

The thesis will contain the following chapters:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 2 – Review of Literature

Chapter 3 – Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 4 – Data Collection and Analysis

Chapter 5 – Results and Interpretations

Chapter 6 – Conclusions, Managerial Implications and direction for Future Research

Human resource is the life blood of any organisation and organization culture is the oxygen. With strategic planning and careful management, employees can become biggest asset for the organization. With changing expectations of employees during covid 19 and increased social, financial and mental pressure, this study can help organisations in developing resilient workforce management models to retain and develop employees for managing successful business operations. This will lead to higher employee satisfaction, motivation and retention and they will be ready to take challenging roles to lead organisation to new heights.

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